

LAST * TRAINING RESORTS *



TRIPPING THROUGH THE WINTER WONDERLANDS OF THE WEST

THERE'S something to be said about good service these days. many resorts talk the talk of making their guests feel special, but few actually provide it. And those that do will sometimes go even further and provide venues that are exciting and beautiful—places where visitors can revel in both the spectacle of nature and the party atmosphere

Such is the case with four of the best ski resorts in the West. The Yellowstone Club of Big Sky, Mont., which is private, offers beautiful views of the Gallatin Mountains as well as untrammled powder. Then there's the classic Sun Valley Resort in Sun Valley, Idaho, which gives guests a glimpse of Hollywood's golden years as well as dozens of ski runs. The nearby community of Ketchum is full of Hemingway history and down-to-earth residents.

Canada's classic winter destination is, of course, Whistler/Blackcomb, with restaurants, hotels and a pair of mountains to behold – not to mention the 2010 Winter Olympics. And in California, Northstar-at-Tahoe resort in Truckee has become a hub of snowboarding, with terrain parks that are equally accommodating to skiers. The resort plays host to national and regional snowboarding competitions and is building a community with condominiums and a new Ritz Carlton hotel/condo addition.

Each of these destinations offer deluxe community living, amenities and beautiful surroundings that are part of a trend in which resorts are offering more ways to pamper and impress their guests.





* THE YELLOWSTONE CLUB

WHAT BECOMES most apparent about Yellowstone Club, beyond its snow-capped terrain, cozy lodges and residential communities, is that it offers a world of private luxury.

With an invitation to this exclusive ski-and-golf resort located halfway between Bozeman, Mont., and Yellowstone National Park and a check for \$300,000, you can open your front door and ski over to a chairlift that will carry you to the top of the Pioneer or Andesite Mountains. You can lunch in your own abode or at one of the lodges. Construction is underway on the 110,000-square-foot Warren Miller Lodge, which will include condominiums, a dining room, retail and office space and, should you feel like dancing, a ballroom. Renowned ski-film producer Miller is the club's honorary director of skiing. One can also glide over to the Rainbow Lodge, Buffalo Bar & Grill or the Timberline Café for a relaxing lunch before venturing back onto the powdery slopes – slopes so powdery and private that the company actually trademarked the name “Private Powder.”

At the Yellowstone Club, there is room amid the 13,400 acres of Montana snowscape for 864 private residences – 300 of which are already built. CK Design and Construction in Big Sky, for example, has built several of Yellowstone Club's winter homes and mountain chalets and is putting the finishing touches on a 13,000-square-foot alpine residence that fetched close to \$8 million.

Friends of members are welcome to stay at one of the 20 custom-designed and furnished log cabins. Each cabin comes with a king-sized bed, fireplace, TV/DVD, stereo and -views of Big Sky's Spanish Peaks.

The promise of privacy is the big attraction at Yellowstone Club, and is the centerpiece of why founder Timothy Blixseth developed it six years ago.

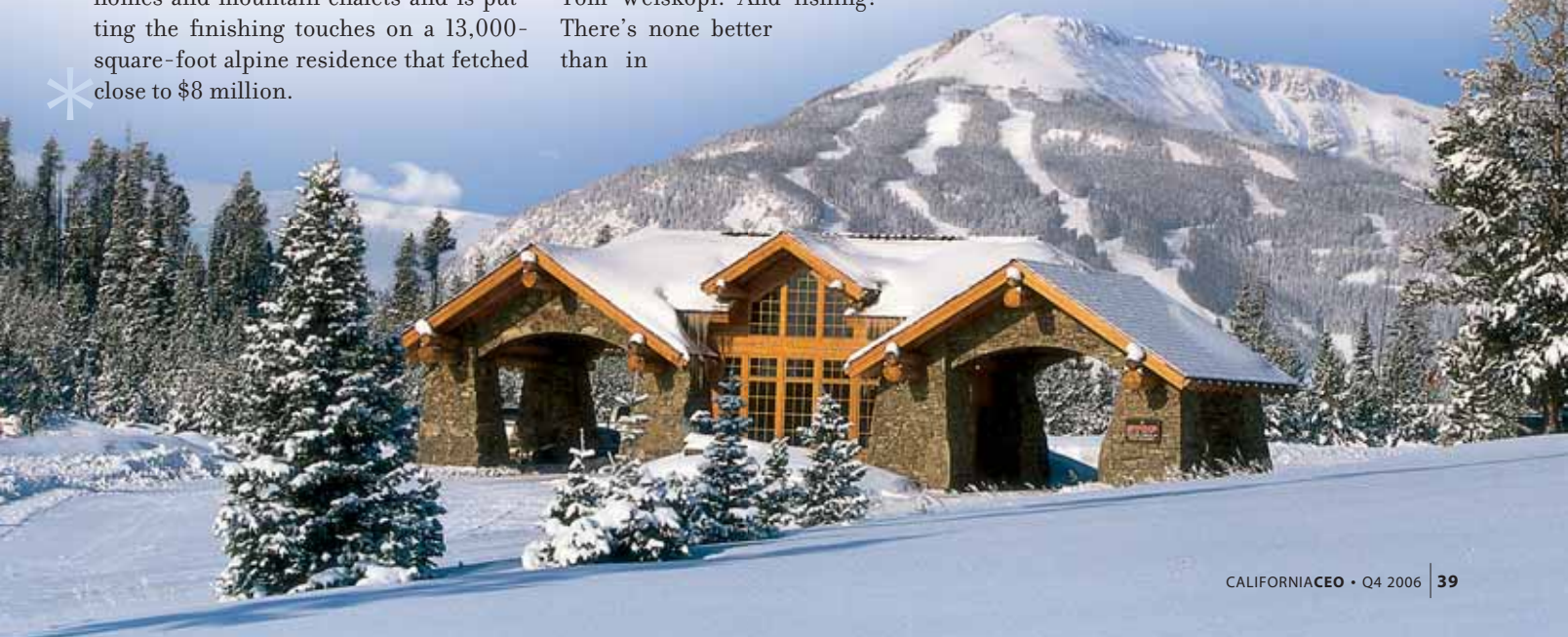
Blixseth, a self-made billionaire (*Forbes* ranks him No. 645 among the wealthiest in the United States), made his fortune largely by investing in timber company Crown Pacific Partners LP. Riding on that success, he ingeniously paid \$140 an acre for 13,400 acres of timber land in Montana, only to trade it for 13,400 acres of U.S. Forest Service land adjacent to Yellowstone National Park and at the doorstep of the majestic Rocky Mountains. Blixseth makes his home in Rancho Mirage (before his lumber bonanza, he worked at being a songwriter in Hollywood and now has his own record label under the Warner Bros. banner.) Yellowstone Club was to be the family's Northwestern escape, but after friends showed immense interest in the idea, the private club was launched.

And in the summer, residents can enjoy the 7,200 yard, 18-hole course designed by former British Open and Senior Open (now Champions Tour) champion Tom Weiskopf. And fishing? There's none better than in

Montana's rivers. Yellowstone Club offers miles of private fishing along the Southwest fork of the West Fork of the Gallatin River, and there's access to several other stellar trout rivers.

It turns out Blixseth's Yellowstone Club model was worth repeating around the world. He recently created Yellowstone Club World, which, so far, offers members access to three private getaways that span the globe. For a \$3 million buy-in, and the required invitation from a member, you can take a private jet to Mexico and relax on the white beaches of El Tamarindo or practice your backswing on the third best golf course in the world. Or come face-to-face with tropical marine life at Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean. And then you can take a yacht out for a little fishing and more sun-worshipping.

From there, why not spend a week or two strolling the grounds of France's Chateau De Farcheville, where one can witness medieval jousting and drink mead by the stein-full. By 2008, Blixseth will unveil another Weiskopf-designed golf course and private community at St. Andrews, Scotland, golf's birthplace. Each destination is available to members for an annual fee of \$75,000 – discounted if you happen to be an existing Yellowstone Club member. But it's limited to 150 memberships.





SUN VALLEY RESORT

HISTORY is inescapable at Sun Valley Resort, America's first and one of its most storied winter and summer retreats. Count Felix Schaffgotsch, at the behest of W. Averell Harriman, chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, was commissioned to discover a place out West to which Union Pacific trains could transport the glitterati of Hollywood and the well-to-do – similar to what Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel accomplished some years later in Las Vegas. After a lengthy search, Schaffgotsch found his Xanadu in the mountains. Harriman bought 4,300 acres at \$10 an acre, and a crew began building the foundation for a lodge northeast of Ketchum in May of 1936. At a cost of \$1.5 million, the Sun Valley Lodge was complete and the opening that December would be attended by Hollywood's big names, such as Claudette Colbert, David Selznick and Joan Bennett. Clark Gable and Ingrid Bergman came to see Sun Valley (and to be seen). Groucho Marx was rumored to have married discreetly there. Lucille Ball brought her children, Lucie and Desi Jr. to the lodge, no Desi Sr. though. The lodge itself is adorned with hundreds of black-and-white pictures of stars past.

The specter of Ernest Hemingway is a major contributor to the lore of the renowned resort. Hemingway stayed in Room 206 where much of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* was typed out. Years later in Ketchum, a place he adored, he would take his own life. A memorial to Hemingway erected in 1966, remains today just off Trail Creek Road, one mile northeast of the Sun Valley Lodge. Sun Valley's connection with Hollywood remains to this day, attracting such celluloid stalwarts as Clint Eastwood, Tom Hanks, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. All have built homes in the area and Eastwood and Schwarzenegger work out in the lodge gym. Jack Sibbach, Sun Valley's director of sales, says celebrity citations are relatively common at Sun Valley. But at this Idaho

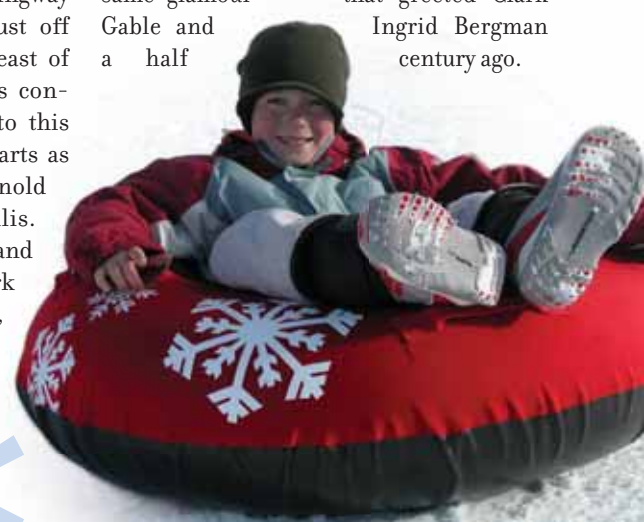
resort, they are treated like common-folk.

“There's always been a rumor that Arnold went into the Pioneer Restaurant and there was a two-hour wait,” Sibbach says. “Arnold told the waiter, ‘But I'm Arnold Schwarzenegger,’ and the waiter said, ‘So. You're going to have to wait like everybody else.’ Arnold liked that.”

What the waiter said rings true throughout the down-home community, where building codes forbid structures taller than three stories and hillside development is banned. Sibbach likes to eat breakfast at The Kneadery, a kind of everyman's restaurant that offers fantastic food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is just one of more than 50 restaurants in the area. There are 20,000 residents in Blaine County and Sibbach has been one for 28 years. Mt. Baldy, at 9,105 feet offers 78 runs, 18 lifts and panoramic views, and is at the heart of Sun Valley's beauty.

Is Sun Valley stuck in a time warp? Maybe.

Sibbach says it was the late 1960s when the resort last did any expansion work. But in the past 15 years more than \$150 million was spent on infrastructure improvements and remodeling. The Lodge Apartments are getting the final touches of a \$6 million renovation, and, with free Wi-Fi, you can sit by the lodge fireplace with a hot toddy and check your email. But for close to 50 years, the famed resort has retained the same glamour that greeted Clark Gable and Ingrid Bergman a half century ago.



Those who know, know Halekulani.



Image by Barbara Kraft

TRAVEL + LEISURE: *"World's Best Hotels, Top 100"*
2006 Readers Poll - #19, ranked consecutively Top 50 since 1996

CONDE NAST TRAVELER: *"Top 50 Best Resort Spas"*
2006 Readers Poll - SpaHalekulani #2

AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION: *"AAA Five Diamond Award"*
2006 La Mer, only Five Diamond Restaurant in Hawaii for 16 consecutive years

ZAGAT SURVEY: *"America's Top 100 Hotel Restaurants" (as featured in USA Today)*
2006 La Mer #8 & Orchids #44

LEADING HOTELS OF THE WORLD: *"Commitment to Quality Award"*
2005 Halekulani, Best Hotel in US & Canada

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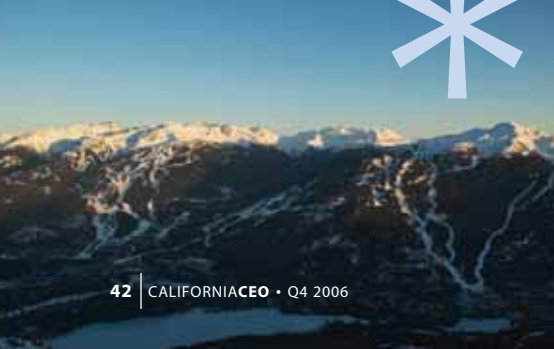
RANDY LINKS



DEAN COTE



PAUL MORRISON



RANDY LINKS

WHISTLER/ BLACKCOMB

RANDY LINKS

WHILE the Yellowstone Club keeps itself camouflaged in privacy, Whistler/Blackcomb is decidedly unprivate. In fact, if you've never heard of this British Columbia resort, you certainly will soon because it will host the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Spread over two mountains, the renowned region offers discriminating guests 8,100 skiable acres, 200 trails, 33 lifts and 12 alpine bowls. It features superb skiing and snowboarding.

The resort even offers heart-skipping heli-skiing thrills. This season marks the 25th year in which Whistler Heli-Skiing has offered heli-skiing. While grabbing a ride on a Bell 212 helicopter to one of the Canadian province's highest peaks remains relatively expensive (\$695 per person and up to \$18,000 for a group), it's not for ski experts only. Those who enjoy intermediate slopes can generally handle the drop that heli-skiing offers. So yes, you too can be like that person in one of Warren Miller's films carving S-turns in virgin powder.

The Whistler resort is divided into five areas: Whistler Village, Village North, Upper Village, Whistler Creekside and Whistler Valley. There are more than 120 restaurants spread throughout the area, featuring choices such as the popular Hy's Steakhouse in Village North and Il Caminetto Di Umbe in the Whistler Village.

After a nice Italian meal and perhaps a drink at the Dubh Linn Gate Irish Pub, one can leisurely walk back to the hotel—walking is the way of the people in Whistler, where once you're there, a car is seldom needed.

There are more than 115 places to toss your shoes and lay back in Whistler, and there will likely be more as the area gears up for the Olympics. Among the elite are the Fairmont Chateau Whistler and The Four Seasons Resort both in the Upper Village. The Fairmont sits at the base of Blackcomb

Mountain and is rated one of the top 50 ski resorts by *Condé Nast Traveler*. The Four Seasons, while relatively new to Whistler, has a reputation for service that precedes itself. Though the hotel is mere steps from Blackcomb's Wizard Express lift, a valet is available to carry your gear to and from the hotel's lobby.

While the bobsled track and back country trails and other elements of Olympic infrastructure were being developed on the mountains, the Four Seasons Whistler was being built at their base. There are 273 guest rooms at the hotel and another 37 residences in the neighboring Four Seasons Private Residences Whistler. Those residences, which originally went for between \$2.1 million and \$5.8 million each, sold in five hours. Each building is built in a style the blends with the mountain, says Director of Marketing Ciro Tacinelli. "We like to borrow from the landscape," he says. "It looks like it has emerged from the mountain, the wood, stone, flora, fauna—it compliments the area." The jagged roofline of the hotel mimics the mountain behind it.

The Four Seasons Whistler is a so-called "strata-titled" hotel, an increasingly common concept in which individual investors own a room or rooms but are required to rent them most of the year. Industry experts such as Kevin Walker, chair of the Hotel Association of Canada, say strata hotels are becoming a staple in Canada. The Ritz Carlton, he says, is credited for creating the concept in the early 1970s.

The Four Seasons Whistler is the company's second mountain resort venture, the other being in Jackson Hole, Wyo. While the company's attention to detail doesn't vary at any of its properties, Tacinelli says the Whistler property maintains a rustic charm and luxury and stays "true to the landscape."

NORTHSTAR-AT-TAHOE RESORT

THE COMPETITION for skier and snowboarder dollars is fierce among California's many ski destinations. Finding a unique niche can make all the difference.

Northstar, once the conservative-if-not-provincial alternative to the swanky likes of Heavenly Valley or Squaw Valley, is banking heavily on grabbing more of the coveted 15-to-25-year-old market. The demographic not only has the most disposable income and is the most ardent skiing and snowboarding segment of the industry's population, but it helps attract others such as younger siblings and parents.

So three years ago, Chris Ryman, Booth Creek's chief executive and owner of Northstar and five other resorts on both coasts, merged his company with Snow Park Technologies LLC and hired its president, snowboarder and terrain designer Chris Gunnarson, to head up Booth Creek's youth market development department.

"I was hired by Chris Ryman because he felt we weren't doing a good enough job capturing the youth market," Gunnarson says, adding with some bravado that he is reputed to be the best terrain-park designer in the industry. He says his hiring is "a testament to Chris [Ryman] being a sharp CEO."

Gunnarson set about to create terrain parks at Northstar: halfpipes, staircases, box jumps, rails and walls. There are now five terrain parks, with names such as Pinball and Moonshine, at Northstar, as well as six non-traditional snow-riding areas that Gunnarson developed. While certainly catering to the younger snowboarder, the designs are also meant to be skier-inclusive. Since their development, Northstar's terrain parks have been lauded with numerous awards, including the 4th Best Place in North America to Snowboard, according to *TransWorld Snowboarding* magazine. Northstar has also played host to snowboarding competitions such as Vans Triple Crown, Vans Cup, ESPN Winter X Games and the United States of America Snowboard Association Nationals.

"Chris is the future of snowriding," says Bill Fiveash, vice president of sales and marketing at East/West Partners, the company that oversees Booth Creek's real estate transactions. "He's got the vision for what snowboarding is all about."

While Gunnarson is working to bring skiing and boarding at Northstar into the modern

world, Fiveash is enticing the resort's clientele to live there. He presides over Northstar's other notable transformation: The Village. The residential/commercial community has just completed its first phase: 100 two- and three-bedroom condominiums with 100,000 square feet of ground-floor retail shopping, an outdoor ice rink (converted to a roller rink in summer), nine fire pits and views of the pine-scented Ponderosas and Sierra peaks. Each of the units was offered for between \$1.3 million and \$1.9 million. All are sold.

But Fiveash is just getting warmed up. Two thirds of the 92 units in phase two have been sold, with the remainder expected to go by the end of the year. Also, a 175-room Ritz-Carlton hotel/condo project just broke ground this summer, with a 2009 completion date. The entire sixth floor will be dedicated to 23 penthouse condominiums.

Fiveash says companies such as the Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons and Fairmont all want to get a piece of the lucrative skiing market, and so are investing in resort partnerships. East/West considered other five-star hotel brands, but "we felt the Ritz-Carlton was the best." Talks and planning with the Ritz began about five years ago.

Around the hotel grounds, East/West will develop the first phase of The Highlands, a neighborhood of high-end town homes. The first phase will include 16 four-bedroom homes at 3,400 square feet, with prices tipping \$4 million. The zoning at Northstar will allow development of 1,450 additional residences, which will take East/West's development backlog into 2020.

Booth Creek is also spending \$50 million on a new ski lift with six-person chairs, development of 60 additional ski terrain areas, expanded parking, a bigger snow-making system, completion of Schaffer's Camp restaurant and the relocation of the cross-country center. Another crucial development, which has added extra polish to Northstar's veneer, is the opening of expert-level ski runs. "Opening Lookout Mountain, that was big," says resort media director Nicole Cox, of the 200-acre, black-diamond runs. "It's so advanced. It changed people's perspective of Northstar."

Myke Folger has authored two books and was the former managing editor of Washington CEO.

